

**PREPARATION FOR DEATH AND
JUDGMENT.**

122.

A

S. E R M O N

PREACHED AT THE

LOCK-CHAPEL,

APRIL 30, 1786,

UPON THE OCCASION OF THE

**DEATH of the Rev. DR. CONYERS,
OF DEPTFORD.**

BY THOMAS SCOTT,

MORNING PREACHER OF THE LOCK-CHAPEL.

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BY THE OCCASION OF THE



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L viii.

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T H E

P R E F A C E.

TH E ensuing Sermon was preached merely as a practical improvement of the affecting providence, which gave occasion to it; and for the edification of that single congregation before whom it was delivered; without the least intention of publication. Some of the audience, having been considerably affected and quickened by hearing it; and hoping that others might derive similar advantage from perusing it; suggested, several days after, the first idea of printing it.

Still, however, it would probably have gone no further, had not some hints from a very respectable quarter induced me to set about transcribing the substance of it. The same enlarged zeal and benevolence which have dictated and patronized so many measures for the glory of God, and the tem-

poral and spiritual good of mankind, approving of and countenancing this feeble endeavour, have determined the publication.

Not having notes, I could not possibly send to the press precisely the same sermon I delivered from the pulpit. Want of recollection, at some distance of time, must cause numberless lesser variations. Others I judged it proper to make intentionally; abridging, omitting, adding, and altering, as seemed most calculated for usefulness. Especially, it was necessary more exactly to state, more fully to elucidate, and more strongly to argue some points before an impartial public, than was needful before a candid and favourable audience. Though the substance therefore of the Sermon be the same in the method, argument, and application; yet they who were present when it was delivered, will perceive considerable alterations.

But the grand difference is unavoidable: I mean the difference in point of animation between speaking in public, and writing in the study. This gives extempore preaching its grand advantage, alone countervails a variety of disadvantages, and renders it so generally more acceptable to those who have got accustomed to it. But when the sermon is printed, it loses all this advantage:

tage : and no wonder that the same truths make not the same impression. Hence many sermons well received from the pulpit, are totally disregarded when published. As I have apprehensions that the same persons who requested the publication may be disappointed on the perusal, I would give them this intimation of the real cause.—I can only say, I have done all I was capable of, though much less than I desired, to keep up the animation.

However, the subject and occasion being so interesting, and I hope treated in a plain, serious, and practical manner, according to the oracles of God, I am encouraged to expect some good from it to the souls of men. Being desirous of practising, as well as preaching an active preparation for the closing scene ; and to occupy with my talent, such as it is, till my Lord come ; many judgments concurring that the publication might do some good, and could do no harm, I hesitated no longer.

To the glory of that Lord, whose, at least, I desire to be, and whom I would serve, I devote this feeble endeavour to promote practical godliness. To his blessing I humbly recommend it, and sincerely beseech him to accompany the perusal with

with the efficacious operations of his Spirit; that *at that day*, the writer and the readers may rejoice and praise his name together, for the benefit he hath by means thereof communicated to their souls.

June 7, 1786.

THOMAS SCOTT.



A S E R.

A

S E R M O N, &c.

LUKE xii. 40.

BE YE THEREFORE READY ALSO: FOR THE SON
OF MAN COMETH AT AN HOUR, WHEN YE
THINK NOT.

THE frequency with which this warning is inculcated in the sacred scriptures, alone evinces its importance. Three Evangelists record the prophecy of our Lord concerning the approaching desolation of Jerusalem: they all gradually draw off our thoughts from the event, primarily intended: lead them to, and fix them on a still more solemn and interesting scene; even the second coming of Christ to judge the world: and then conclude the important subject, with a warning similar to that of my text. "Therefore be ye also ready; for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of Man cometh *." "Take ye heed, watch and pray, for ye know not when the time is †." "Take heed to yourselves, lest at

* Matt, xxiv. 46.

† Mark xiii. 33.

"any

" any time your hearts be overcharged with
 " surfeiting and drunkenness, and the cares of
 " this life, and so that day come upon you
 " unawares ; for as a snare shall it come upon
 " all them that dwell upon the face of the
 " whole earth—Watch ye therefore, and pray
 " always, that ye may be accounted worthy to
 " escape all these things, which shall come to
 " pass, and to stand before the Son of Man *."

In this chapter the same improvement is made of another subject. A certain person, unseasonably interrupting our Lord's discourse, requested him " to speak to his brother to divide the inheritance with him :" doubtless considering this as a matter of greater moment to him, than the subject, on which our Lord was discoursing. He, declining this as foreign to his character and employment, which were entirely spiritual ; thence takes occasion to caution his audience against covetousness : impresses this caution on their minds, by the parable of him, who rich to himself, and not to God, was summoned by death, just when he was purposing to enjoy his affluence, and promising himself many years of worldly felicity : then he enforces on his disciples indifference about worldly things, contentment with a little, trust in Providence, fruitfulness in works of mercy, and habitual preparation for death and judgment. This last he illustrates by the situation of a servant, appointed to watch for his lord's return from a wedding ; and by that of a householder expecting the

* Luke xxi. 34—36.

assault of a thief. Sobriety and watchfulness would be incumbent on persons thus circumstanced : much more on us—“ Be ye therefore ready also ; for at an hour, when ye think not, the Son of Man cometh.”—From which interesting words we will,

I. Consider the event, for which we are exhorted to be ready.

II. Enquire wherein that readiness consists ?

And III. Propose some conclusive arguments, which prove the necessity of our being always ready.

And whilst I endeavour to discourse on these subjects ; may the Lord impress all our minds with deep solemnity ; present eternal things to our view in their certainty, nearness, and importance ; enable us rightly to understand and willingly to entertain the instruction contained in these words ; and to speak and hear, as if from this sermon we expected an immediate summons to meet our Judge.

I. Let us consider the event, for which we are exhorted to be ready.

And here our subject necessarily leads us to consider our situation in this world. Before an audience, assembled to worship God, and hear his word, many things may be assumed as truths, which in some places might require, and would easily admit of abundant proof. The first principle of all our religious enquiries, is the existence of one God ; who is infinite in greatness, majesty, glory, and excellency : the everlasting, self-existent, and universal creator, and upholder of all things :

worthy of all possible love, worship, honour, and submission ; " whose is the kingdom, and " the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen." His creatures we are, " from him we have life, " and breath, and all things," " and in him " we live, and move, and have our being." Being constituted diverse from, and superior to, all the other inhabitants of this lower world, we are evidently intended for other, and nobler purposes, than they : being capable of receiving the knowledge of God, and of our relations and obligations unto him ; of perceiving the glory of his perfections, as reflected from all his works ; of discerning between moral good and evil ; and of performing a reasonable and voluntary service. We appear designed expressly for the exercise of religion, and to perform that worship and service to our Maker and Benefactor, of which he is so worthy, and to which he hath so just a claim. We alone are able to understand and to be governed by a law, to be influenced by motives, and actuated by hopes, and fears of future consequence ; and therefore we alone of all creatures here below, are accountable to our Maker for our conduct.

These things are, indeed, the probable conjectures of reason ; but they stand not on that basis : divine revelation confirms all these rational inferences ; and with authority also demands our belief of the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the body, a future judgment, and an eternal state of retributions : wherein the whole man, both body and soul, shall

shall enjoy the most exquisite felicity; or endure the most intense and inexpressible misery for ever, " according to the things done in the " body, whether they be good or evil."

But this is not all: We are not only rational and accountable creatures, and in a future state designed for immortal existence: we are also fallen and sinful creatures.—Our great Creator, Governor, and Judge, hath given us a perfect law, reasonable, equitable, and good in all its requirements: immortal life and felicity are therein promised to him, who yields obedience; an awful curse is pronounced against every transgressor.—" By this law is the knowledge of sin." Every deviation * from its perfection, whether by omission or commission, by excess or deficiency, is sin. And the wages of sin is death. Love of God with all our powers; love of all men as ourselves, form the substance of this law; which, excellent and lovely as it is, shuts all men up under condemnation. For being thus *spiritual*, and having respect, as much to the affections, imaginations, and intentions of the heart, as to the words of the tongue, or actions of the life, it condemns ten thousand things, we naturally should not esteem deserving of condemnation. Thus our Lord pronounces causeless anger and malice to be an infringement of the sixth commandment; and lewd imaginations, affections, and intentions, to be adultery in the sight of God. " And he that keepeth the whole law, " and offendeth in one point, is guilty of all;"

* ἀνομία, 1 John iii. 4.

for, like other laws, it condemns a man for one transgression : nor can it be pleaded in arrest of judgment, that we never broke the law before, nor ever intend to break it again : or though we have committed adultery, we never committed theft or murder. Such pleas would not avail us before man's tribunal, nor will they at the bar of God.

From Mount Sinai the Lord himself delivered this law, in ten commandments, with every circumstance of terror, which could express the awful condition of mankind, as sinners, under its condemnation ; and warn them to flee from the wrath to come unto the salvation of the gospel, held forth to the Israelites by bloody sacrifices, and divers purifications.— These very commandments have now in the name and presence, and by the authority of God, been pronounced in your hearing : and upon your bended knees, as transgressors you have supplicated mercy : as prone to transgress, have besought the Lord to “ incline your “ hearts to keep each precept ; ” “ and to “ write them all in your hearts.” I trust this is not with many of you a mere form, but that you are deeply convinced, that this is your character and situation : yet, with too many, this is all a solemn mockery ; and they have neither in their judgment of themselves, correspondent sentiments, nor in their hearts, suitable affections.

But would you seriously compare your whole temper and conduct ; your thoughts, words, and actions ; your pursuits and pleasures, your behaviour

behaviour to God and man ; the government of your appetites and passions ; your manner of spending your time and substance ; the use you made of your abilities and influence in time past, and are making at present : would you, I say, compare these things impartially with this holy law of God, after mature reflection you could not deny, but that you had broken every one of the ten commandments. We have broken the first commandment by idolizing ourselves and the world ; by proud self-admiration ; and by supremely valuing, pursuing, and delighting in earthly things. We have broken the second by mean unworthy thoughts of God, neglecting his instituted worship, and preferring our own or human inventions. The third by irreligion and profaneness, and irreverence to his sacred name. The fourth by neglecting to keep holy, and by actually profaning the Lord's day in worldly employments, trifling engagements, or carnal indulgences. And all the rest by misbehaving ourselves in relative life ; being injurious to the persons, connections, property, or characters of our neighbours ; by covetous, sensual, ambitious, revengeful imaginations, wishes, purposes, converse, and behaviour. Thus, without supposing you guilty of any gross and scandalous wickedness, (which, nevertheless, I fear many of you have been and are) let your conscience determine whether I have not proved you and myself guilty of transgressing all the ten commandments, and under the condemnation of the whole law.

Hence death reigns and triumphs.—“ By
 “ one man sin entered into the world, and
 “ death by sin, and so death passed upon all
 “ men, in that all have sinned.”—Death is no
 debt of nature, as some affect to call it, but
 a debt to divine justice. A public execution
 implies previous condemnation and crimi-
 lity. Having sinned, we are condemned. Hear
 the sentence, “ Dust thou art, and to dust thou
 “ shalt return.” Death is the execution of that
 sentence. Nothing but the hatred which a
 God of holiness bears to sin, could induce him
 to destroy the admirable work of his own hands;
 for, in the nervous language of the Holy Ghost,
 “ it repenteth him, that he hath made man.”

Many crimes injurious to society are deemed
 deserving of an ignominious and violent death,
 which is all the punishment that man can in-
 flict: “ Having killed the body, he hath no
 “ more that he can do.” But what are all the
 little interests of men compared with the glory
 of God, and the interests of his universal and
 everlasting kingdom? And what are all crimes
 against society compared with the malignity of
 the creature’s rebellion against his Creator, the
 infinitely glorious God? The injustice, ingrati-
 tude, contempt, enmity, opposition, and per-
 verseness that is in every sin, can only be esti-
 mated by his infinite mind, who sees every
 thing, and every character in their true colours,
 and judges of every thing according to truth.
 And he deems sin deserving of the everlasting
 punishment of body and soul in hell, hath de-
 nounced this sentence against all sinners, and
 will

will certainly execute it upon all who do not repent and believe the Gospel.

Lest under this awful sentence, all must have inevitably perished. We could have contrived no method of salvation, which might consist with the honour of God : we could have made no atonement to divine justice for our sins : the depraved disposition of our heart even precluded all *sincere* endeavours to attain unto " holiness, without which no man shall see the " Lord :" nor could we ever have rectified the temper of our hearts, any more than Satan can recover from his former rectitude, and rise by his own power to be a holy angel.—Nay, left entirely to ourselves, we should every day grow more wicked, sink deeper under condemnation, and encrease the weight of our eternal misery. Nor do I hesitate to say (what I trust is warranted by the word of God) that, as certainly as all men sooner or later must die, notwithstanding all human contrivances and endeavours to the contrary : so all men must have perished for ever, without help from themselves or others, had not a gracious God interposed. The plan of redemption by the blood of the Son of God, and recovery to holiness by the new creating power of the Holy Ghost, proclaims this humbling, alarming truth. A deep conviction of it is the only preparation of the heart for understanding, embracing, and valuing the Gospel. They, who are not thus humbled, count the preaching of the cross foolishness : and without thus preparing our way, we may preach even the love of Christ without

without effect ; “ For every mouth must be stopped, and all the world found guilty before God.”

Thus condemned to everlasting punishment, without help or hope from ourselves, we stand on the brink of eternity. One after another is by death transmitted to the judgment-seat of God, and fixed in their eternal state. For what the general judgment will be to the world at large, that death proves to every individual. In the New Testament, the coming and day of the Lord are represented as at hand. Many ages have already elapsed, and many more shall doubtless yet succeed, previous to that grand and solemn scene : (for the prophecies of scripture must needs be fulfilled.) But what is that to individuals ? The numerous inhabitants of the earth through all these succeeding generations already do know, and have entered upon : we soon shall know, and enter upon our eternal, unchangeable state. The resurrection of the body and the general judgment will complete the felicity or misery of that state, and display to the whole universe the glory of God therein. As then death and judgment are so connected in reality, we cannot associate them too closely in our ideas and expectations. Meanwhile, being respited by the long-suffering of God, we are under a dispensation of mercy. Not the uncertain conjectures of reason, but authenticated revelation assures us, that God is merciful, and that “ there is forgiveness with him.”—Mercy so rich and abundant, forgiveness so large, that no degree of guilt excludes

cludes the offender from sharing it :—Mercy and forgiveness exercised in a way (far beyond, and even contrary to all our conceptions and contrivances, but) devised in his manifold wisdom ; expressive of his perfect holiness ; honourable to his righteous law ; vindicating his awful justice ; worthy of himself ; calculated to stamp sin with eternal infamy ; to humble and fill the pardoned sinner with admiring love and gratitude, and to produce and enlarge all holy affections in his soul.—“Without con-
 “ troversy great is this mystery of godliness,
 “ God was manifested in the flesh.” “ His
 “ name was called Emmanuel, God with us.”
 “ He (and not another) was wounded for our
 “ transgressions, was bruised for our iniqui-
 “ ties,” “ and suffered once for sins, the just
 “ for the unjust :” “ that God might be just,
 “ and the justifier of him who believeth in
 “ Jesus.” “ For herein is love, not that we
 “ loved God, but that he loved us, and sent
 “ his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”

Having in this grand event displayed in one view his infinite abhorrence of sin, and love of sinners, he judges he may now honourably pardon and save all who apply for this salvation ; and come unto God through him, “ who risen
 “ from the dead, ever liveth to make inter-
 “ cession for us.” This salvation he proclaims in his word : “ commands all men every where to
 “ repent :” warns them to “ flee from the wrath
 “ to come :” instructs them “ to flee for re-
 “ fuge unto Jesus Christ by faith :” invites
 “ him that is athirst to come, and whosoever

" will to take of the water of life freely :" exhorts the wicked to forsake his wickedness, and turn unto the Lord ; to strive to enter in at the strait gate, and to use the means of grace : engages " to give his Holy Spirit to all who ask for him ; " that the power of corruptions and evil habits, or temptations, may neither excuse him that despises, nor discourage him who desires this salvation : assures them, that Christ will in no wise " cast out him that cometh, but that whosoever believeth shall be saved :" allures them with exceeding great and precious " promises :" confirms them with the covenant and oath of God, " that they might have a strong consolation, who flee for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before them :" counsels them " not to neglect such great salvation, for how then can they escape :" and tenderly expostulates with them, " As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way, and live : turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways, for why will ye die ? " Thus doth the Gospel address the sinner, proposing salvation to him, urging his acceptance, and leaving every one without excuse, " who will not come unto Christ, that they may have life ; " but through pride and worldly affections pour contempt on the wisdom, truth, and mercy of God.

Thus the Lord waits to be gracious, and prolongs, according to his sovereign holy purpose, our lives from day to day. At length the period he has appointed arrives ; the scene closes,

closes, and death fixes the final happiness or misery of every individual, according as he hath, or hath not embraced this salvation ; is, or is not found ready.

Our situation in this world, and its connexion with eternity being thus ascertained, we perceive what that event is, for which we are to be ready. As rational and accountable creatures ; as sinners guilty, polluted, and condemned ; as dying, yet to live after death to all eternity in the joys of heaven, or the torments of hell ; as under a dispensation of mercy and grace, whereby all things requisite are freely given for Christ's sake to every one that asketh for them ; be ready, prepare to meet your God, your Creator, and Judge ; whenever by death, he shall summon you into his presence.—We therefore enquire,

II. Wherein this readiness consists ?

Surely it consisteth not in the acquisition or possession of wealth.—Yet numbers act as if this were the one thing needful : as if *they* lived to good purpose, and died happy, who *leave behind them*, fifty or an hundred thousand pounds. This grand object engrosses their thoughts, affections, time, and attention : to this all other pursuits are postponed, all other interests subordinated : for this the exercise of piety and charity must be contracted or neglected ; too often justice disregarded. Six busy days afford no leisure for religious exercises, and transmit them jaded to the sabbath, as *their* day of relaxation and refreshment : or a day of weariness more intolerable than all the

rest. “ When will the sabbath be gone, that
“ we may set forth corn, making the shekel
“ great, and the ephah small, and falsifying
“ the balances by deceit.”

“ Take heed and beware of covetousness,
“ for a man’s life consisteth not in the abun-
“ dance of the things that he possesseth :”
neither the comfort, credit, usefulness, or
length of it. Anxieties, suspicions, snares, and
temptations, alone are multiplied with increas-
ing wealth. “ How hardly shall they that have
“ riches enter into the kingdom of heaven !
“ It is easier for a camel to pass through the
“ eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter
“ into the kingdom of heaven.”—Men may
express their admiration at such truths, as the
disciples did, and exclaim, “ Who then can
“ be saved ?” The answer is put into our
mouths, “ The things which are impossible
“ with man are possible with God.” Some,
who are rich in the world, are also rich to-
wards God ; some with whom “ riches in-
“ crease, set not their hearts upon them ;” but
are rich “ in good works ;” “ and even by
“ their faithfulness in the *unrighteous mammon*, ”
(in getting, keeping, and spending whereof,
men commit so much unrighteousness) “ lay
“ up treasure in heaven.” But comparatively
they are but few : and none who love and
trust in riches, and expect an accession of feli-
city from increasing wealth, rather than from
increasing holiness, can be in the way of sal-
vation ; “ for if any man love the world, the
“ love of the Father is not in him.” “ And
“ they

“ they that will be rich” (being exposed through that covetous desire) “ fall into temptation, “ and a snare, and into divers foolish, and hurt-“ ful lusts, which drown men in destruction “ and perdition : for the love of money is the “ root of all evil.”

Moreover riches not being properly our own, but committed to our stewardship : not only do not ward off, or retard the stroke of death ; but, when not faithfully improved, they ren-
der its approach in every respect much more formidable.—“ Give an account of thy steward-
ship ; for thou mayest be no longer steward.” They who tenaciously keep possession of their riches, till death produces a reluctant separa-
tion, get little thanks from surviving heirs : who generally in their turn find them a preg-
nant source of jealousy, contention, and ill-
will, and an occasion of additional sin, and temptation.—A traveller, who approaches, in
order to cross, the ocean, bowed down under a heavy burden of such things, as afford him neither present enjoyment, nor prospect of future emolument ; and as must very shortly be left behind upon the shore ; yet assiduously, and anxiously increasing his load : forms no unapt emblem of a character and conduct, but too commonly observable. I mean the char-
acter and conduct of such, who have already more than adds to their enjoyment ; nay much that burdens them with solicitude, and cum-
ber ; and besets them with temptations and snares ; who may very soon, and must ere long, leave all behind them for ever ; and yet “ there
“ is

" is no end of all their labour," in adding to their useless and troublesome abundance.—But can this be a rational conduct, a suitable preparation for a dying hour?—Yet is not this the very preparation some of you are making? Are not some of you thus eagerly pursuing wealth? Exulting in your success; or murmuring under disappointment? Or, like the covetous man in this chapter, saying " Soul take thine ease, " eat, drink, and be merry, thou hast goods laid up for many years."—And now, should God say, " Thou fool, this night, thy soul shall be required of thee." The justice of the sentence, and of the attendant rebuke, must be evident to your conscience; nor would your superfluous wealth prove the least source of comfort, or alleviation of your awful condition.

Nor was his preparation in the least degree any better, " who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day." Who made choice of these for *his good* things, and looked for no higher pleasures. The luxury, the elegance, the pomp, and pride of life, which form so great a part of the business, conversation, ambition, and indulgence of those, who can, and those who cannot afford them; however their doting admirers may defend their innocence; doubtless form a miserable preparation for a dying hour. Such an attention to animal gratification and external embellishment, prostitutes the affections, and debases the dignity of the rational and immortal soul; betrays a groveling and trifling mind; and is utterly inconsistent with the sim-

plicity and spirituality of the Christian religion. The wealth thus lavished (if creditors have not a claim to it) demands a better improvement : the time ought to be redeemed to better purposes : and each professor of the gospel ought, by his example, to bear testimony against the prevailing extravagancy, and folly of a luxurious, dissipated age and nation ; and by no means to give a sanction to it. Nor can he, whose *satisfaction* lies in such things, point out any favourable distinction betwixt *himself*, and that rich man, who lived thus splendidly and luxuriously, and when he died, “ lift up his eyes in hell being in torments.”— Yet are not even some present thus engaged ? —Are not there such among you, who are more eager to possess, and more ambitious to excel in, and more afraid and ashamed to be outstript in these things, than in righteousness and true holiness ? Do not some spend twice the time about these things, that they do in secret devotion ? Perhaps ten times the money, which they can afford for acts of charity ? And is this the spirit, temper, and conduct of a Christian ? Let conscience determine, if it be not callous. Are these trifles ? The world accounts them not so ; for they *sneeringly* observe that *religious* people, in *their* way, are as fond of the indulgences and distinctions of the world as other people ; which I am sure is no credit or *adorning* to the doctrine of God our Saviour.—I say, are not some thus conducting themselves ? For I bless God, we have many honourable exceptions to the general depraved taste of the age.

age.—And, which of the two characters, (such whose care is to put on Christ, and to be adorned with good works, and the beauties of holiness, whilst outward things are comparatively slighted ; or such whose conduct is the very reverse) do you suppose are most ready for death and judgment ? However you may chuse to live as the latter ; I am sure you would wish to die *as* the former. O that men would think of these things, that they would be wise, that they would consider their latter end.

Nor are the ambitious pursuits of greatness, power, or praise : or even the indefatigable labours of the learned ; whilst Christ is rejected, and his gospel (which is the wisdom of God) undervalued, and despised, in any respect a preferable preparation for a dying hour. Nor would any of you wish to receive the awful summons at the masquerade, the theatre, the opera, or the card-table. After all, which apologists have urged in behalf of such diversions ; they cannot pretend that they are any part of that watchfulness, and readiness for the coming of the Lord, about which we are enquiring. They cannot say that in frequenting such amusements they are walking in the steps, and imitating the example of Jesus Christ. Nor can they shew that in seeking relief from the *tediousness* of duty by such relaxation, they have that mind in them, which was in him, whose *meat* it was to do the will of God. Nor can they reconcile such diversions with these three precepts : “ Be not conformed to this world :” “ Redeem your time :” “ Whether

“ Whether ye eat, or whether ye drink, or
 “ whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of
 “ God.” Make these precepts the rule of
 your conduct, delight yourselves in God, and
 prepare to meet him in judgment ; and you
 will have no more leisure or inclination for
 such vanities.

Permit me to add, that even moral decency
 of conversation, formal worship, or evangelical
 profession and notions, with various similar *religious* attainments, however men may rest in
 them, and value themselves upon them, come
 far short of the necessary preparation : “ For
 “ except your righteousness exceed the righ-
 “ teousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye
 “ shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of
 “ heaven.”—But if these things are all impro-
 per, or inefficacious, what shall we think of
 the conduct of vast numbers, who are so far
 from being ready, or making diligent suitable
 preparation, that they are daily adding “ drun-
 “ keness to thirst,” and “ sin to sin ;” pro-
 faneness to debauchery, and infidelity to pro-
 faneness.

I hope your attention is not wearied, nor our
 enquiry interrupted by this seeming digression,
 not foreign, I trust, to our main subject. For
 by considering some of the most common ways
 in which men waste their lives, till death sur-
 prizes them unprepared, and plunges them into
 irremediable misery ; we may to *more effect* con-
 trast therewith that diligent and constant, and
 earnest preparation, the word of God enforces.
 This preparation, I apprehend, is twofold : A

D preparation

preparation by which the soul is secured : And a preparation, whereby that security is evidenced, improved, and rendered apparent for our comfort. Every true believer *habitually* possesses the former : when vigorously exercising grace, and diligently practising his duty, he *actually* enjoys the latter. We may, therefore, call the former the *habitual*, the latter the *actual* preparation for death and judgment : Or if this distinction please not, we may denominate the one our precedent and introductory, and the other our consequent and continued preparation.

I. Our precedent and introductory preparation, whereby we become habitually safe, and therefore ready, consists in acceptance with God, and a *meetness* for heaven.

Having incurred the divine displeasure by transgression, the wrath of God must abide upon us, unless, or until we apply for and obtain forgiveness.—If we are cut off by death without the pardon of our sins, that wrath must abide upon us for ever ; for “ the wicked is “ driven away in his wickedness : ” Nor will even the ransom of the death of Christ avail in this case ; “ Beware lest he cut thee off with a “ stroke, and then a great ransom cannot save “ thee.”—On the other hand, “ blessed is that “ man, whose transgression is forgiven, whose “ sin is covered, and to whom the Lord im- “ puteth not iniquity.” How vile soever he hath heretofore been, he is now safe, and happy.—We have already seen whence this forgiveness springs ; in what manner the way is opened

opened for its honourable exercise; how it is proposed to all who hear the Gospel, and in what manner it with authority demands our acceptance. This acceptance is called “the “obedience of faith,” and Christ “is become “the Author of eternal salvation to all them that “obey him.” The man who truly believes the testimony of God in the sacred scriptures concerning the Deity, the incarnation, humiliation, sufferings, death, resurrection, and mediatorial exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ: who perceives the necessity, the nature, and the glory of such an extraordinary expedient to render the salvation of sinners compatible with the honour of the divine law, justice and purity: who cordially approves of a salvation so humbling to man, and so honourable to God: who, as a sinner, is sincerely desirous to be saved from a deserved eternal condemnation, in this way: and who applies to, and trusts in Christ alone for the pardon of his sins, the acceptance of his person, the sanctification of his heart, and the eternal salvation of his soul, through his merits, atonement, intercession, and grace:— This man, I say, “sets to his seal that God is “true,” honours all the divine attributes, displayed in the Gospel, and is thus fully pardoned, and justified, and shall be eternally saved. “He shall not come into condemnation, but “is passed from death unto life.”—But he who believes not this testimony; who rejects this salvation, as seeing no occasion for it, and no glory in it; and who either is careless about eternal things, or seeks acceptance in ways of

man's devising, and more suited to man's pride: He makes God a liar, pours contempt on every divine attribute; defies his justice, despises his grace; and affronts his manifold wisdom, which angels behold and adore in the church purchased with Emmanuel's blood: But it is to his own loss; for thus he seals and aggravates his own condemnation.

As unbelief always is accompanied with impenitency; so faith springs only from a penitent heart: "Therefore repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ," comprise the conduct, character, and experience of the sinner, who seeks salvation in the acceptable method.—That blessed Spirit, who applies to the soul the salvation, which flows from the love of the Father, through the purchase of the Saviour's blood (that glory may be to God the Father, Son, and Spirit for ever) begins the work by "convincing us of sin."—Illuminating the mind to perceive in some degree the glorious character, and perfect law of God, he shews us proportionably the odiousness of sin, and the vileness of our conduct and character; and produces a disposition in us to abhor sin, and abase and condemn ourselves as sinners; and convinces us that justice is armed against us, and undeserved mercy our only refuge. When the mind is thus somewhat prepared for the discovery, we are led to consider the truths of the Gospel, and to see somewhat of their nature and glory, which before were hid from us: In proportion as we with enlightened minds, under the influences of the Spirit of truth,

truth, look to the cross of Christ, we are made more sensible of the demerit and hatefulnes of sin, of our own guilt and depravity, and of the sinfulness even of our best performances. This effectually deprives us of all hopes of being saved in any other way, and inspires us with ardent desires, and feeble expectations of being saved in and by the Lord Jesus Christ.—Thus we are led to seek salvation, where it may be found; to use the means which the Lord hath appointed; to wait with patient expectation, though tried by delays and discouragements (for we have now no whither else to go, and are consciously unworthy of every favour); to long and pray for faith; to be willing to leave all worldly interests and pleasures for Christ, and count them but loss and dung: To examine anxiously what is wrong in our manner of coming to Christ; and what in our conduct, or dependance, excludes us from the tokens of his love, in which others rejoice: And still with greater earnestness to use the means of grace; to watch against the approach of sin, and apply ourselves to perform our duty; yet still to grow more jealous of our hearts, lest we should trust in any thing but free mercy through Christ alone. When the soul is thus humbled, and weaned from other dependences, and prepared to make a good use of encouragement: that favour will be bestowed, and then the believer, “ abounding in hope through the power “ of the Holy Ghost,” learns to rejoice in forgiveness of sins.

Other sorts of experience, and faith, and confidence, and joy, may be separated from the " meetness of the inheritance of the saints in light ;" but this cannot.—They who despise spiritual blessings, and have an aversion to spiritual occupations and holy company, cannot be fit for the society and employment of heaven. The proud and ambitious, the luxurious, and dissipated, and covetous, the envious and malicious, could find nothing there suited to their disposition, or capable of affording them satisfaction : They are not only condemned to, but " vessels of wrath, *fitted* for destruction." " Ye must be born again." But when through this gracious change, wrought in the soul by the Holy Spirit, we become capable of perceiving the glory, loving the excellency, and relishing that pleasure, which is to be found in spiritual things : When spiritual blessings are supremely valued, spiritual exercises delighted in, religious society sought after : When sin is abhorred, the world despised, Christ become precious ; righteousness hungered and thirsted after; the humbling salvation of the Gospel cordially approved and embraced, and its holy precepts chosen, and the whole glory given unto the Lord : then we are evidently fitted for the society, worship, and employments of those holy spirits, who with exalted love and gratitude, are giving glory and honour to God and the Lamb for ever.

But 2. Even of these very persons, who " have been thus turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto " God ;"

" God ;" who " have received forgiveness of sins, and are both entitled to, and meet for an inheritance amongst all them who are sanctified ;" some live in a more strict and constant course of consequent preparation than others ; and the same persons more at one season than at another.

There are seasons when in some measure we are all too anxious about, and entangled by worldly things ; betrayed into wrong tempers, or inexpedient indulgences ; comparatively unwatchful, lifeless, and negligent in our attendance on public ordinances, or secret devotion.—When it is thus with us, though *as believers* we habitually possess a readiness, yet in another sense we are not ready, " our loins are not girded," " we are not as servants waiting for the coming of our Lord :" And his approach would startle us, excite perplexing doubts and gloomy apprehensions, and fill us with confusion and remorse.

Opposed to this unwatchfulness is that tenor of conduct, and frame of spirit, which forms our consequent and perpetual readiness. When the believer daily examines himself, both respecting his state, conduct, growth in grace, and victory over his corruptions : When he constantly and impartially reviews whatever occupies his thoughts, or engages his affections ; whatever relates to the regulation of his appetites and passions, his tempers and conversation ; whatever passes in public, or in private ; in his closet or family ; in his business, in company, or in the house of God : When

he

he judges himself, and scrutinizes his own conduct with scrupulous exactness; keeps his heart with all diligence, and without reserve confesses humbly before God every thing that he but suspects hath been amiss; seeking forgiveness expressly through the blood of Christ: When in the exercise of repentance and faith, by continual earnest prayer, seeking the invigorating influences of the Holy Spirit, he daily is employed in striving against sin; in mortifying the deeds of the body; in opposing especially his strongest enemy, his own constitutional or customary iniquity; and in aspiring after a more entire victory over the world, an increase of spiritual affections, and a conversation more becoming the Gospel of Christ:—When a Christian is actually thus “setting his affections on things above, not on things on the earth,” in a believing prospect of approaching dissolution, and its important consequences, he is indeed ready for the coming of his expected Lord.

Furthermore, * “the Son of man, is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work.”—Every Christian is the servant of Jesus Christ: Every servant has his own place, his own work, his own talents.—In filling up that place, doing that work, and improving those talents, wisely, faithfully, and diligently, do we approve ourselves his servants, and best prepare for his coming.—The minister’s work is to “preach the word, instant

* Mark xiii. 34.

“ in

" in season and out of season." A few (like David, Daniel, and Nehemiah) are called to serve God and their generation in the exercise of civil power and authority. These are doing their work, when they assiduously and conscientiously improve their advancement for the promotion of religion, the welfare of society, and the happiness of mankind.—The employment of the rich is to do good with their abundance, by alleviating the miseries, increasing the comforts, and discountenancing the wickedness of all around them, as much as possible. Those who have not such abundance, may find their work in less expensive, but more self-denying, and not less acceptable instances of kindness to the distressed (as Tabitha, in "making coats and garments for the poor.") The poor themselves are to serve Christ by diligence, frugality, honesty, cheerful content, and a humble respectful deportment to their superiors. The man who is employed in commercial dealings, will find his proper service to our common Lord in a line of conduct strongly marked with integrity, removed at a distance from the appearance and plausible suspicion of avarice, fraud, and oppression : " By rendering " to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and to " God the things that are God's ; " and by laying out upon the needy, according as God hath prospered him.—In short, every situation in society, or in relative life, has its peculiar duties, and affords peculiar occasions of serving God, adorning religion, and doing good to mankind. In understanding and doing our

own proper work with quietness and cheerfulness, not envying those above, nor despising those beneath us; nor intermeddling with another's work, nor quarrelling with our fellow-servants : but disinterestedly, in our proper place, serving the common cause of God and his church: joined with universal conscientiousness and watchfulness, do we best prepare for the coming of our Lord. And whatever his employment be, “ blessed is that servant, whom his “ Lord when he cometh shall find so doing.”

III. I would propose some conclusive arguments, which prove the necessity of our being always ready.

(1.) Were we required to be ready for an event, which might, or might not take place, our negligence might admit of some excuse—but “ it is appointed unto all men once to die, “ and after death the judgment.” That event for which we are thus assiduously to prepare, is of known, and acknowledged certainty ; whilst all other future events, and emergencies, about which we are anxious, and for which we are making provision, are totally uncertain ; and whilst we are taking care for many years, we may never live to see many days. Can we then act reasonably ; if we provide so carefully and laboriously for an uncertainty : and bestow no pains to provide for an undisputed certainty ?

(2.) Death to individuals, and judgment to the world will not only *certainly* arrive, but when the most of men never expect them : “ When they say peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them as travail “ upon

" upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape." " For the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night."—The appointed hour of death is kept from each of us, in impenetrable secrecy; not only beyond our discovery, but even our probable conjecture. Death is all around us indiscriminately preying upon tender infancy, blooming youth, vigorous manhood, and decrepit old age. The feeble linger on, the robust are hurried away. Wasting sickness, or hoary hairs warn a few of approaching dissolution, who yet seldom profit by the warning: more are cut off without previous notice.—A fall, a blow, a robber, a nocturnal conflagration, or some of the innumerable unforeseen appointments of God, which men falsely call accidents, hurry multitudes from vigorous health, eager pursuits, and sanguine expectations, to meet their Judge, and hear their doom. One drops by an apoplexy, another is seized by madness, and a third by a fever and delirium, who raves a few days, and dies. Like a field of battle, they fall on the right hand, and on the left: we are hitherto wonderfully preserved; but at what hour, or by what stroke a Sovereign God may cut us off, we know not, nor can we conjecture. Is it not reasonable we should be always ready?

(3.) Should a sudden calamity deprive us of all earthly comforts; we might hope for a favourable reverse, to reinstate us in prosperity: or the favour of God, and the hope and earnest of heaven might silence our complaints, and

brighten our prospect.—But if unexpected death cut us off unprepared; our opportunity is eternally lost, our hope has given up the ghost, and the blackness of darkness bounds the dreary prospect for ever. Surely we have reason enough to prepare for a decision, which may take place this hour; which once passed can never be reversed; and on which the interests of eternity depend. Assuredly it would be irrational to run the hazard of a miscarriage for one moment, though in that moment we could secure the empire of the universe. “For what is a man profited, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”— Yet are not some present convicted of their own consciences that they are hazarding all these irreversible and awful consequences; by procrastinating in the concerns of their souls from month to month, and year to year; for the sake of such things as are most trifling and transitory? And is this the conduct of *rational* creatures?

(4.) Were that happiness, or misery which the Bible reveals, though eternal, yet imperfect, and mixed; this might somewhat account for the infatuation of leaving the event in suspense, till some craving lust was gratified. But the whole extent, and force of human language is employed, and labours, and is exhausted in representing the absolute, and unmixed felicity of heaven, and misery of hell. All that man is, or ever shall become capable of enjoying, and consequently all that God can bestow upon him:

him: and all that his powerful wrath can inflict on the immortal spirit, and incorruptible body to all eternity, are now depending: the important decision is at hand—need I say, be ready? I need not, if men's eyes were not blinded by the god of this world.

(5.) Even our comfortable enjoyment of life greatly depends on being prepared for death.—Who can relish even the feeble pleasure, which temporal things are capable of communicating, with this thought corroding his heart? “I may die this night, this hour: I am to—“ tally unprepared: ‘tis therefore possible that “before another hour I may lift up mine eyes “in hell.” And though more pleasing and welcome thoughts commonly thrust out this salutary reflection: yet it will sometimes intrude even in the vigor of health, in the midst of company, and in scenes of mirth and dissipation: however like some dire spectre it will be sure to haunt the hour of distress, and the bed of sickness, or to mingle with whatever reminds us of death and judgment. But how must it enhance our comforts, and mitigate our sorrows, and deliver us from the fear of death, to “know that when this earthly house “of our tabernacle shall be dissolved, we have “a building of God, an house not made with “hands, eternal in the heavens?”

(6.) Nor can our judgment of our situation in reference to eternal things, fail to have a powerful influence on our conduct. He, who judges, or fears that he is unfit for death; yet neglects, or postpones a thorough preparation,

must and will shun solitude and reflection, and endeavour to silence the voice of conscience. Hence perpetual hurry of business, or diversions: hence, when these are found too feeble effectually to free him from the torment of thinking, he takes refuge in debauchery, or infidelity.—Thus guilt accumulates, and wrath is treasured up against the day of wrath, and “ revelation of the righteous judgment of “ God.” But the well-grounded hope of salvation arms the soul as with an helmet; keeps it steady as an anchor; inspires courage and resolution to labour, venture, and suffer for Christ; infuses sweetness into religious exercises; and rends the soul, “ stedfast, unmoveable, al-“ ways abounding in the work of the Lord, “ as knowing that his labour is not in vain in “ the Lord.”

(7.) Finally, at the approach of death many have grievously lamented the neglect of preparation; none ever lamented having been too diligent in preparing. Many have lamented their inattention to the gospel, to the means of grace, and to the concerns of eternity: but none ever at that time lament that they have missed opportunities of gratifying their appetites, frequenting amusements, and taking worldly pleasure. Pious Christians often mourn, at that solemn period, lost opportunities for service, unimproved talents, unfruitfulness, and negligence: but none regret having renounced the world, denied themselves, borne their cross, laboured for Christ, and minded the one thing needful.—When standing on the

verge

verge of both worlds, if not before, men begin to form a more proper estimate of their comparative value. Let us profit by their judgment; and now employ ourselves, as they wish they had, or rejoice that they did: then shall we indeed be ready also.

I am persuaded, brethren, that many of you have all along perceived, that I chose this subject with reference to the death of the late Dr. Conyers, of Deptford, an honoured, able, and useful minister of the gospel.—From authentic information you will probably be gratified, and edified ere long with a variety of interesting particulars respecting his character, life, and death. But this is not my province: it is enough for my purpose to observe, that last Lord's day morning he was so far in health, as to perform the * service, in his parish church.—In the second lesson (which was the xxth chapter of Acts) having solemnly pronounced the words—“ and now I know that all ye “ among whom I have gone preaching the “ kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. “ —Wherefore I take you to record, that I am “ pure from the blood of all men; for I have “ not shunned to declare unto you all the “ counsel of God;” He paused; applied the words to his own ministry among those present; and appealed to their consciences, that he had thus discharged his trust, and was pure from their blood, whatever were their present conduct, or future doom. Then he proceeded,

* All but the Communion Service, which was read by his Curate.

preached,

preached, concluded, or was concluding the blessing, when he was suddenly taken ill, and (not to dwell on circumstances not fully authenticated) died before three o'clock that afternoon. Without doubt this event was to him inexpressibly glorious, and joyful. If we except the case of those, who concluded and sealed their testimony with their blood, shed in confirmation of the truth they preached; we cannot conceive a minister dying more in character, or more honourably.—Like a soldier dying sword in hand, valiantly defending his country.—“ Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my latter end be like *his.*” “ Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord when he cometh shall find so doing.”

But had it been your case!—Should death single out you, before you leave this place of worship! What would be the consequence? The providence of God joins issue with his word, and loudly proclaims, “ Be ye ready also.”—And are you ready?—Do you start? Does conscience declare the contrary? What an awful situation had you now been in, had the God, in whose hand is your life, called you instead of his ready servant! Oh ye gay, ye thoughtless, ye who are dreaming vain dreams of earthly felicity, on the very verge of eternal misery, pause, reflect—“ Let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy into heaviness.”—“ Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.” “ Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his

" his thoughts, and let him return unto the
 " Lord, and he will (yet) have mercy upon
 " him, and to our God, and he will abun-
 " dantly pardon." But it must be without
 delay : " you must seek the Lord while he
 " may be found." " Behold *now* is the ac-
 " cepted time ! Behold *now* is the day of sal-
 " vation !—Therefore *to-day*, if ye will hear
 " his voice harden not your hearts" lest to-
 morrow should be too late, " and he should
 " swear in his wrath, that you shall never enter
 " into his rest." And you must address your-
 selves to this busines with all earnestnes ;
 " strive to enter in at the strait gate ; for many
 " will seek to enter in, and shall not be able ;"
 " When once the Master of the house hath
 " risen up, and hath shut to the door ; and *ye*
 " begin to stand without, and knock—saying,
 " Lord, Lord, open to us, and he shall answer,
 " and say unto you, I know ye not whence ye
 " are—then shall be weeping, and gnashing of
 " teeth." That this may not be your case,
 return home, I beseech you, retire, and on
 your bended knees, supplicate him, who is yet
 seated on a throne of grace, and exalted to
 give repentance, and forgiveness of sins, to
 prepare your souls for meeting him shortly
 upon his judgment-seat.

But, my brethren, as you value your im-
 mortal souls, do not rest satisfied with a mere
 profession, or a hope grounded upon some
 general convictions of sin, approbation of the
 gospel doctrines, encouragement received under
 the word, or the good opinion of Christians

and ministers. Remember the foolish virgins : they had the lamp of profession, were admitted to the company of, and continued undetected by the wise virgins : yet had they not the oil of true grace. They had a religion, which satisfied others, and themselves until “ the “ coming of the Lord ;” but utterly failed when they had most occasion for it, and left them in outer, and eternal darkness.—Oh examine yourselves, and beg of God to examine you, and shew you whether you have scriptural evidence that your sins are forgiven, and your hearts changed by divine grace. That man alone, who abiding in Christ, and looking to him daily, learns to abhor all sin, to love, and long after all holiness, to despise the world, and to seek his comfort here, as well as hope of heaven hereafter, from the exercise of grace, and the performance of his duty, will when Christ shall appear, have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming. In this way therefore “ give all diligence to make your “ calling and election sure : for if ye do these “ things ye shall never fall ; but so an entrance “ shall be ministered to you abundantly into “ the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and “ Saviour Jesus Christ *. But he that lacketh “ these things is blind.”

And, my Christian brethren, let us make it our business “ to have our loins girded, and “ our lamps burning, and be like men, who “ are waiting for the coming of their Lord.”

* 2 Pet. i. 12, 13.

Let us watch and labour each in his place and post. Now is the time to do something for the cause of God on earth, amongst sinners : “ The night is coming wherein no man can work.” According to the advice of Solomon *, “ Whatsoever thine hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might ; for there is no work nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, whither thou goest.”— “ Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given unto us : whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the portion of faith : or ministry, let us wait on our ministring ; or he that teacheth on teaching ; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation. He that giveth, let him do it with simplicity ; he that ruleth with diligence ; he that sheweth mercy with cheerfulness.— “ Let love be without dissimulation—abhor that which is evil ; cleave to that which is good †,” &c.—In this way let us be daily making preparation for death ; and then we need not perplex ourselves with distrustful apprehensions about it : our God will order every circumstance relating to our closing scene, as shall be most for his glory, the edification of others, and our own comfort and advantage : he can, and we may trust he will illuminate the gloomy valley, and make even the King of terrors wear a smile.

* Eccl. ix. 10.

† Rom. xii.

And

And as the Lord is depriving his church of those, who have been faithful and useful, pray for us, my brethren, who remain, that we may thus preach, labour, live, and die. And finally let us all join in earnestly praying the Lord of the harvest to send forth *labourers* into his harvest. Amen, Amen.

F I N I S.



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